

A NEW MILLENNIUM FOR ILLINOIS AGRICULTURE

Illinois' most famous citizen, Abraham Lincoln, called agriculture the "largest interest" of the nation when he established the USDA in 1862. In 1863 the Nation's first crop production report was issued and the statistical records of agriculture began for the Nation and Illinois. The following 23 pages are printed in this year's Annual Summary to commemorate our entering a new millennium of agriculture with its accompanying crop and livestock reports issued by the Illinois and United States Departments of Agriculture. The historical data series issued in these pages tells the story of decreasing farm numbers, ever-increasing farm productivity, and fluctuating prices farmers receive for their commodities. It records the early beginnings of soybeans, the development of corn hybrids and the switch from horse-power to machine-power.

Illinois agriculture began thousands of centuries ago when the Ice Age Glaciers moved across the continent leveling the countryside and depositing fertile soil over much of the state. The recorded history of Illinois began in 1673 when Marquette and Joliet first set eyes upon its lands. Although early Indian tribes were planters, it was the pioneers of the late 1700's who began the state's agricultural development. In the early 1800's two Illinois men helped revolutionize agriculture as John Deere perfected the steel plow and Cyrus McCormick developed the grain reaper. In the same time period Chicago evolved as a major agricultural and industrial city and became the undisputed capitol of the Midwest. From the 1840's to present day, Illinois has retained its position as the center of America's agricultural heartland.

Agricultural statistics verify the significance of agriculture to Illinois' total economy and Illinois' contribution to the Nation's total agriculture. For instance, Illinois accounts for only about 4 percent of the nation's farms, but produce about 14 percent of the corn and soybeans, 7 percent of the pork, and account for 6 percent of the total agricultural exports. Most people would be amazed to learn on a given spring day Illinois farmers might plant 800,000 acres of corn or during fall harvest combine 500,000 acres of soybeans.

Of course, soybeans, corn and hogs are the major cornerstones of Illinois agriculture, but you will also find a wide variety of agricultural enterprises throughout the state. Illinois leads the nation in production of horseradish and pumpkins, and is a significant producer of wheat, oats, grain sorghum, hay, peaches, apples, popcorn, sweet corn, processing vegetables, mushrooms, nursery crops, and a host of others. Illinois is also a major producer of milk and beef, and you will find sheep, chickens, turkeys, horses, bees, goats, ducks, mink and fish being raised on Illinois farms.

Illinois' farm real estate is valued at over 56 billion dollars, average gross farm income is usually 8 to 9 billion dollars and farmers spend up to 7 billion dollars for production inputs. Illinois is also a leader in off-farm agricultural industries, such as agricultural services, soybean processing, meat packing, dairy manufacturing, grain storage, feed milling, vegetable processing, manufacture of farm machinery and foreign exporting.

If the past is prologue, then Illinois Agriculture will continue to play a vital role in the health and future of our Nation's agricultural industry. New trends, new commodities and new farming techniques will undoubtedly greet us in this new Millennium. Our agency looks forward to working with farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, universities and other government agencies to not only record for future generations the changes and progress in store for Illinois agriculture but to provide meaningful and timely statistics that benefit farmers in their planning and marketing decisions.